

# Word of the Day

July 4 – July 10

**Highlighted word:** New word. Unsure about its meaning or pronunciation.

## aphelion

Noun | a-'fēl-yən | af-EEL-yun | July 4, 2020

### Definition

: the point farthest from the sun in the path of an orbiting celestial body (such as a planet)

### Did You Know?

*Aphelion* and *perihelion* are troublesome terms. Which one means a planet is nearest to the sun and which means it is farthest away? An etymology lesson may help you keep those words straight. Just remember that the "ap" of *aphelion* derives from a Latin prefix that means "away from" (the mnemonic "'A' for 'away'" can help too); *peri-*, on the other hand, means "near." And how are *aphelion* and *perihelion* related to the similar-looking astronomical pair *apogee* and *perigee*? Etymology explains again. The "helion" of *aphelion* and *perihelion* is based on the Greek word *hēlios*, meaning "sun," while the "gee" of *apogee* and *perigee* is based on *gaia*, meaning "earth." The first pair describes distance in relation to the sun, the second in relation to the Earth.

*perihelion* (n.): the point nearest to the sun in the path of an orbiting celestial body (such as a planet)

*apogee* (n.): the point in the orbit of an object (such as a satellite) orbiting the earth that is at the greatest distance from the center of the earth

*perigee* (n.): the point in the orbit of an object (such as a satellite) orbiting the earth that is nearest to the center of the earth

### Examples

"Our planet reaches *aphelion* only once a year, and the event typically falls approximately 14 days after the June solstice, which marks the first day of summer for the Northern Hemisphere and the first day of winter for the Southern Hemisphere. Similarly, *perihelion* happens two weeks after the December solstice." — [Hanneke Weitering, Space.com, 4 July 2019](#)

"Currently about 34 [AU](#) from the Sun, Pluto is still slowly approaching its *aphelion*, the farthest point in its orbit from the Sun, where it will lie nearly 50 [AU](#) from our star." — [Alison Klesman, Astronomy, 3 Apr. 2020](#)

[AU](#) (abbreviation): astronomical unit

## deracinate

Verb | (,)dē-'ra-sə-, nāt | dee-RASS-uh-nayt | July 5, 2020

## Definition

1 : [uproot](#)

uproot (v.): to remove as if by pulling up

2 : to remove or separate from a native environment or culture; *especially* : to remove the racial or ethnic characteristics or influences from

## Did You Know?

There is a hint about the roots of *deracinate* in its first definition. *Deracinate* was borrowed into English in the late 16th century from Middle French and can be traced back to the Latin word *radix*, meaning "root." Although *deracinate* began life referring to literal plant roots, it quickly took on a second, metaphorical, meaning suggesting removal of anyone or anything from native roots or culture. Other offspring of *radix* include [eradicate](#) ("to pull up by the roots" or "to do away with as completely as if by pulling up by the roots") and [radish](#) (the name for a crisp, edible root). Though the second sense of *deracinate* mentions racial characteristics and influence, the words [racial](#) and [race](#) derive from *razza*, an Italian word of uncertain origin.

## Examples

The old-fashioned gardening book recommended *deracinating* every other plant in the row to allow the survivors room to grow.

"In many ways, the couple's self-removal [befits](#) the *deracinated* monarchy. Once upon a time, English monarchs were sovereign, supreme. The occasion of democratizing reforms such as the [Magna Carta](#) beginning in the late Middle Ages brought the English monarchy down, down, like [glistening Phaethon](#), into 'the base court.'" — [Grant Addison, \*The Examiner\* \(Washington, DC\), 9 Jan. 2020](#)

[befit](#) (v.): to be proper or becoming to

[glisten](#) (v.): GLITTER: to shine by reflection with many small flashes of brilliant light : [sparkle](#)

[Phaeton](#) (n.): a son of Helios who drives his father's sun-chariot through the sky but loses control and is struck down by a thunderbolt of Zeus

## legerdemain

Noun | ,le-jər-də-'mān | lej-er-duh-MAYN | July 6, 2020

## Definition

1 : [sleight of hand](#)

sleight of hand (noun phrase): a cleverly executed trick or deception : skill and dexterity in conjuring tricks

2 : a display of skill and [adroitness](#)

[adroit](#) (adj.): having or showing [skill](#), cleverness, or resourcefulness in handling situations

## Did You Know?

In Middle French, folks who were clever enough to fool others with fast-fingered illusions were described as *leger de main*, literally "light of hand." English speakers condensed that phrase into a noun when they borrowed it in the 15th century and began using it as an alternative to the older [sleight of hand](#). (That term for dexterity or skill in using one's hands makes use of [sleight](#), an old word from Middle English that derives from an Old Norse word meaning "sly.") In modern times, a feat of legerdemain can even be accomplished without using your hands, as in, for example, "an impressive bit of financial legerdemain."

[sleight](#) (n.): deceitful craftiness *also*: [stratagem](#)

[sly](#) (adj.): *chiefly dialectal* **a**: wise in practical affairs **b**: displaying cleverness : [ingenious](#)

## Examples

"An example of Mr. Northam's political *legerdemain* is his tax proposal, which avoided the minefields of income or sales tax increases. Instead, he suggested hiking the gas tax while [scrapping](#) mandatory annual vehicle inspections and halving vehicle registration fees." — [The Washington Post, editorial, 20 Dec. 2019](#)

[scrape](#) (v.): to remove from a surface by usually repeated strokes of an edged instrument

"One must find the [resonance](#) between ancient and contemporary, blending incongruous elements in a way that seems not only right but inevitable: telling the story of a founding father with hip-hop lyrics, as in 'Hamilton,' or presenting the myth of [Theseus](#) in the [milieu](#) of reality television as in 'The Hunger Games.' Kekla Magoon manages a similar feat of *legerdemain* in 'Shadows of Sherwood,' her compelling reboot of the Robin Hood myth." — [Rick Riordan, The New York Times, 23 Aug. 2015](#)

[resonance](#) (n.): the quality or state of being [resonant](#)

[resonant](#): continuing to sound : [echoing](#) ?

[Theseus](#) (n.): a king of Athens in Greek mythology who kills Procrustes and the Minotaur before defeating the Amazons and marrying their queen

[milieu](#) (n.): the physical or social setting in which something occurs or [develops](#) : [environment](#)

## sound

Adjective | 'saund | SOWND | July 7, 2020

### Definition

**1 a** : free from injury or disease

**b** : free from flaw, defect, or decay

**2 a** : [solid](#), [firm](#)

**b** : [stable](#); *also* : [secure](#), [reliable](#)

**3** : free from error, fallacy, or misapprehension

4 a : [thorough](#)

b : deep and undisturbed

c : [hard](#), [severe](#)

5 : showing good judgment or sense

## Did You Know?

English contains several *sound* homographs, all with distinct histories. For example, the [sound](#) that means "something heard" descends from Latin *sonus* ("sound"), whereas the [sound](#) that means "to measure the depth of water" traces to Middle French *sonde* ("sounding line"). Another [sound](#), as in "of sound mind and body," is the contemporary form of Old English's *gesund*. *Gesund* is related to several words in other languages, such as Old Saxon *gisund* ("sound"), Old Frisian *sund* ("fresh, unharmed, healthy"), and Gothic *swinth* ("sound" or "healthy"). Another relative is Old High German's *gisunt* ("healthy"), which led to modern German's *gesund*, the root of [gesundheit](#).

## Examples

The doctor's statement affirmed that the wealthy man was of *sound* mind when he decided to [bequeath](#) all of his money to the charitable foundation.

[bequeath](#) (v.): to give or leave by will—used especially of personal property

"[Social distancing](#), where people are advised to stay at least 6 feet apart, was *sound* advice when the idea was put forth during the pandemic's early days. It remains *sound* advice now, and will continue to be *sound* advice in the days ahead." — [The Times, 7 May 2020](#)

## emulate

Verb | 'em-yə-, -lāt | EM-yuh-layt | July 8, 2020

### Definition

1 a : to strive to equal or [excel](#)

b : [imitate](#); *especially* : to imitate by means of hardware or software that permits programs written for one computer to be run on another computer

2 : to equal or approach equality with

## Did You Know?

If imitation really is the sincerest form of flattery, then past speakers of English clearly had a great admiration for the Latin language. The verb *emulate* joined the ranks of Latin-derived English terms in the 16th century. It comes from *aemulus*, a Latin term for "rivaling" or "envious." Two related adjectives—[emulate](#) and [emulous](#)—appeared within a half-century of the verb *emulate*. Both mean

"striving to emulate; marked by a desire to imitate or rival" or sometimes "jealous," but *emulous* is rare these days and the adjective *emulate* is obsolete. The latter did have a brief moment of glory, however, when William Shakespeare used it in *Hamlet*:

"Our last king,  
Whose image even but now appear'd to us,  
Was, as you know, by Fortinbras of Norway,  
Thereto prick'd on by a most emulate pride,  
Dar'd to the combat..."

## Examples

Younger children will often try to *emulate* the behavior of their older siblings.

"As part of its subsequent push to *emulate* the West, **Meiji-era** Japan encouraged the production of domestic versions of that same whiskey. Japanese distillers often used sweet potatoes, which were abundant, but they produced a much different **spirit** than the **barley**, corn and **rye** used in Scotland and America." — [Clay Risen, \*The New York Times\*, 29 May 2020](#)

**Meiji**: : the period of the reign (1868–1912) of Emperor Mutsuhito of Japan

**spirit** (n.): **distillate sense 1**: such as : the liquid containing ethanol and water that is distilled from an alcoholic liquid or mash —often used in plural

**barley** (n.): a cereal grass (genus *Hordeum* and especially *H. vulgare*) having the flowers in dense spikes with long awns and three spikelets at each joint of the rachis also : its seed used especially in malt beverages, breakfast foods, and stock feeds

**rye** (n.): a hardy annual grass (*Secale cereale*) that is widely grown for grain and as a cover crop

## bromide

Noun | 'brō-, mīd | BROH-myde | July 9, 2020

### Definition

**1** : a binary compound of **bromine** with another element or a **radical** including some (such as **potassium bromide**) used as sedatives

**2 a** : a **commonplace** or **tiresome** person : **bore**

**b** : a commonplace or **hackneyed** statement or notion

**bromine** (n.): a nonmetallic chemical element of the halogen group that is used especially in the production of flame retardants and formerly in gasoline additives and medicines (such as **bromides**)

**commonplace** (adj.): **commonly found or seen** : **ordinary, unremarkable**

**tiresome** (adj.): **wearisome, tedious**

**bore**<sup>3</sup>(n.): one that causes weariness and restlessness through lack of interest : one that causes **boredom**: such as: a dull or tiresome person

**hackneyed** (adj.): **lacking in freshness or originality**

## Did You Know?

After [bromine](#) was discovered in the 1820s, chemists could not resist experimenting with the new element. It didn't take long before they found uses for its compounds, in particular [potassium bromide](#). Potassium bromide started being used as a sedative to treat everything from epilepsy to sleeplessness, and by the 20th century, the word *bromide* was being used figuratively for anything or anyone that might put one to sleep because of commonness or just plain dullness. Today, bromides are no longer an ingredient in sedative preparations, but we can still feel the effects of figurative bromides as we encounter them in our daily routines.

## Examples

"In many ways, he's an outlier on the self-help circuit. Thomas isn't selling shortcuts to success or feel-good *bromides*. He makes achievement sound grueling. His [knack](#) is for transforming those he meets—a CEO, an NBA All-Star, a guy [manning](#) the desk at a hotel—into the sort of person who loves digging deep and grinding hard." — [Leslie Pariseau, GQ, 28 May 2020](#)

[knack](#) (n.): a special ready capacity that is hard to analyze or teach

[man](#) (t.v.): To take stations at, as to defend or operate?

"Currently, Virginia's leaders are engaged in a tax debate over standard deductions for the middle class. Studying that problem would be a *bromide* that induces [inertia](#). What is needed is action." — [L. Scott Lingamfelter, The Richmond \(Virginia\) Times Dispatch, 20 Jan. 2019](#)

[inertia](#) (n.): indisposition to motion, exertion, or change : [inertness](#)

## histrionic

Adjective | ,hi-strē-'ä-nik | his-tree-AH-nik | July 10, 2020

## Definition

1 : deliberately affected : overly dramatic or emotional : [theatrical](#)

2 : of or relating to actors, acting, or the theater

## Did You Know?

The term *histrionic* developed from *histrion*, Latin for "actor." Something that is histrionic tends to remind one of the high drama of stage and screen and is often stagy and over-the-top. It especially calls to mind the theatrical form known as the [melodrama](#), where plot and physical action, not characterization, are emphasized. But something that is histrionic isn't always overdone; the word can also simply refer to an actor or describe something related to the theater. In that sense, it becomes a synonym of [thespian](#).

melodrama (n.): a work (such as a movie or play) characterized by extravagant theatricality and by the predominance of plot and physical action over characterization

thespian (n.): ACTOR

## Examples

"How many water coolers, cocktail parties, and backyard barbecues have you been to where someone has exclaimed, usually in a flourish of *histrionic* frustration, that they wish they had their own island?" — [Carmella DeCaria, \*The Westchester Magazine\*, 18 Jan. 2018](#)

"The city's most extravagant and *histrionic* event of the fall, Theatre Bizarre, won't be taking place this October.... Typically taking over Detroit's Masonic Temple for two weekends just before Halloween, the indoor event includes hot-ticket masquerade balls, and a multi-floor spectacular that includes live music, burlesque, side show acts, food, drink and mandatory costumes—the more outrageous the better." — [Melody Baetens, \*The Detroit News\*, 19 May 2020](#)

hot-ticket: someone or something very popular : [rage](#)

masquerade (n.): a social gathering of persons wearing masks and often fantastic costumes

ball<sup>2</sup> (n.): a large formal gathering for social dancing

burlesque (n.): theatrical entertainment of a broadly humorous often earthy character consisting of short turns (see [turn entry 2 sense 4d](#)), comic skits, and sometimes striptease acts